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NANTUCKET

"Across the empty room which winter storms once filled"

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NANTUCKET

THE WALK TO SURFSIDE

You turn from Main to Pleasant Street
And there the walk begins.

* * * *

Beside white houses tinged with moss
    Enfringed with hollyhocks
    And decked with brazen knockers—
Beside gray houses dimmed with years
    Entwined with vines,
    Green shuttered, shingled, insignificant,
The street leads on.

And now the town departs.
A corn field waves—
    The Old Mill stands beyond the right.
    A sudden gleam of water from the bay
Paints blue an inch of space
And disappears.

The open moors have come!
And air!
Strong, salt, sea air!
Air born beyond the broad Atlantic's rim
    And blown across three sweet broad miles
Of earth all filled with essences of grass
And pine.

Out now along the gray, green way!
Across the playground of the winds,
Across the empty room which winter storms
    Once filled
And towards the sea.

Another mile.
What sound is this?
What taste of salt upon the lip?
The sea!

Lo there—the rising of the last sand dune,
    Its edge agleam with ribbon grass,
    And keeping to the last its guard
    Upon the view.

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And there a gull—it *is* the sea—a white
Gull flashing through the sun
And whirling in an arc of faultless curve.
And then the sound—I think there *is* no sound
Like this—the everlasting endless boom of surf,
The sound which on Creation's morn
First followed that command, "let there be land,"
And will continue on till atom break
From atom and Earth's day be done.

Just here you reach the top—
Behind, the moors stretch back, grey, still and free,
And overhead more sky than ever spanned
So small a spot,
And underfoot real sand,
And there, ahead,
Blue sea!

Just up the beach
The history of last night's tide
Is sketched in lines of drift.
Another tide is starting in.
Each wave leaves impress on the sand.
A pebble from the coast of Spain,
Some seaweed from an alien shore,
A shell which only yesterday was resting
In some cavern under sea
And here a splinter from a derelict.
The maddened gulls in shrill profanity
Fly screaming back and forth
Picking silvered fish from foam topped waves.
In angry contradiction with the wind
They shriek their imprecations to the skies.

Yet still the waves roll in,
The sky is blue,
The unchanged beach-miles stretch to right and left
The moors await
Subdued by day-end's calm
And sweet with scent.

* * * *

At other times in other days
The thought will come
That even now the breeze which blows
Across your face has crossed the moors;
That
Waiting yet beneath the sun, eternally
At peace, the moors remain,
The sea still sweeping at its gate,
The winds still blowing strong
And silence King.

Paull Hayden 1916

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